An Early Phase of American Art

The World of Copley And of Gilbert Stuart

By Royal Cortissoz

The first month of the art season has brought forward nothing sensational, but it has proved reasonably auspicious. Several good exhibitions of American pictures have come and gone. Their immediate successors are interesting. We traverse below a collection of old portraits of some importance, the collection of works by Copley, Stuart and their circle at the Knoedler gallery. Auction sales so far have been of household things, and they will continue more or less in the same direction until after the holidays, when old masters and modern paintings will be dispersed under the hammer. A novel display is to be opened on Monday, November 14, when a quantity of ancient arms and armor will be presented at the American Art Galleries. Sales of armor are none too frequent in Paris or London. The expert Mr. Bashford Dean, records only

William Pitt

(From the portrait by J. Sharples at the Knoedler Gallery)

four or five in America in his introduction to the catalogue of the collection now to be broken up.

Tradition

Our Debt to It in the Eighteenth Century

To tell certain painters of our time that they have bad manners would be to both enrage and puzzle them. What, they would want to know, have manners to do with art? Some light is suggestively thrown on the subject by the group of about fifteen early American portraits now hanging in the Knoedler gallery. It brings back the tradition of the eighteenth century, English in origin, but developed here as part and parcel of the American habit of mind. Manners had much to do with the evolution of this tradition. They received their initial impetus centuries ago in the courts of the world. It is easy enough to find bourgeois types in the history of European portraiture, but this branch of art was nevertheless peculiarly the property of the nobleman. Titian was a painter of kings and princes. So was Velasquez. So was Rubens. His mode, enriched by that of Van Dyck, was filtered down into the school of Gainsborough and Reynolds, and through that school, supported by an aristocracy, it was carried over into the land of democratic ideals.

Politically we might be as revolutionary as we pleased, but socially we retained for a long time the impress of English custom and this exhibition emphasizes the influence of our forbears across the Atlantic. It has the significance of a kind of moral force. Art without technique is worthless art, but it is a fact that art cannot live by technique alone. Spiritual elements enter into its make-up. A painter inevitably expresses the sentiment of his era. Thus these eighteenth century artists reflect the walk and demeanor of a period far more accurately than some moderns mirror their time when they go out with malice aforethought to paint what they call "actualities." A polished manner was an actuality in the period of Benjamin West. It didn't, as we have indicated, cover the whole ground. Look at West's big portrait of the three Drummonds. It is laboriously built up, too laboriously. On the other hand, its refined distinction is beyond cavil.

It is for their refinement, their good taste, their quality of balance and measure, that these canvases are especially to be studied, for manners reacting upon technique. Consider for a moment the nervous disquietude permeating so many contemporary portraits and then muse upon the lesson of repose as the early Americans understood it. Is it not a virtue of really lasting character? It means something more than the interpretation of subject as subject. Out of the serenity of an eighteenth-century painter's conception of his subject there flowed dignified composition, judgment in the handling of draperies, discreet coloration and respectable draughtsmanship. That he did not always lift such traits to a plane of high artistic eloquence is no repudiation of the value of good manners to workmanship; it simply means that the individual lacked genius. In the absence of that sublime spark the tradition to which we refer was of immense service. Copley, for example, stumbled upon something like inspiration when he painted the great portrait in the Hartford Athenæum; but on the commoner occasions which were more characteristic of him he could paint the "John Gray" of this exhibition, not a masterpiece and yet a fine thing.

With Stuart we come upon the type in which tradition and genius are not infrequently commingled. Students of the portraits of Washington will find divers points of interest in the two Stuarts at the Knoedler gallery. But the student of painting will look at the treatment of the black coat and the linen in the Washington which comes from the house of Henry Lee. There you recognize the touch of the technical virtuoso, faithful to tradition but transmogrifying it by sheer personal power. It is so with all the high lights in the exhibition. They spring from individuality. But all the time it is individuality confessing its fidelity to an ideal of good manners, in life and in painting. Stuart dominates and at the same time there are other artists who hold their own in the ensemble—C. W. Peale, Sharples and so on. The portrait by Ralph Earle is fascinating, more French than English in its light elegance. The Sullys, too, are good to see. It is related that a wit in some Philadelphia mansion, seeing the portrait of an ancestress on one side of the room, painted by Sully, and another portrait on the other side, painted by Chase, murmured to his host: "Well, it is sometimes better to be sullied than chaste." Chase himself would probably have given a certain amused approval to that epigram.

Miniatures

The Annual Show of the American Society

The American Society of Miniature Painters has shown delightful restraint in its twenty-third annual exhibition, just opened at the Arden gallery. It hangs only eighty-six examples. In the nature of things an art of this kind, peculiarly delicate and intimate, should always be set forth on a modest scale. There is no art in which mediocrity is more depressing. Quality, not quantity, is the indispensable canon. This truth is enforced by any collection of old miniatures. There were giants in the old English school and in eighteenth century France. But there were then little men, and women, too, suave practitioners who had their doubtless legitimate place in the market, but whose works to-day spell so much deadly boredom.

In every epoch there are miniaturists who strive to strike a new note by extending their scope. There are instances of this here. Miss Mabel Welch offers us a "Landscape," and we wonder why, especially as she shows in her "Mrs. W. J. Funk" that she is a really capable painter. Why waste time on an incongruous, impossible theme, which she leaves only thin and without texture? Miss Durkee almost persuades us, in her "Still Life," because there is a faintly beguiling merit in her craftsmanship, but she, too, discloses in her "Mrs. W. Travers Jerome, Jr.," the superiority of portraiture to genre in miniature. Of course, there is evidence to be cited in favor of giving the artist plenty of freedom. The Saint-Aubins alone make out a case for the more adventurous spirit. Nevertheless, our school is safer when it sticks to the portrait. If it is defensible anywhere in its claims for a wider sweep it is in some such experiment as Mr. W. J. Baer makes when he paints his "Phoebe" and "Aurelia," but the truth is that these types of idealism are, after all, but variations in portraiture. Departure from convention is otherwise more persuasive when it takes the graceful French turn of Miss Dix's decorative "Mrs. M."

For years there have been two conspicuous exemplars of great skill in the society's exhibitions and it is to be regretted that one of them, Mrs. Lucia Fairchild Fuller, is not present

Mlle. Sigoigne

(From the portrait by Thomas Sully at the Knoedler Gallery)

on this occasion. Her distinguished art was always a tower of strength to the show. Her colleague, Miss Laura Coombs Hills, is superbly represented. There is something like positive *maestria* in this painter's work. She draws with that firmness of touch which is the more refreshing because there is not a trace of hardness about it and her color is brilliant to the point of boldness without ever losing purity or quality. She sends four pieces, all of them beautiful. An inspiriting freedom is cultivated by divers other exhibiters, by Miss Marie J. Strean in her "Mrs. H. W. Redfield," by Miss M. W. Wheeler in "The Black Cloak," and by several others. But the prevailing mode is more conventional, relieved here and there by adroitness in composition, as in the case of Miss Elsie D. Pattee's charming miniature "The Black Fan." We use the term "conventional" in no disparaging sense. On the contrary it is the merit of most of the exhibitors that they play the game according to the old conservative rules—and play it well. The eighty-six miniatures maintain an unusually high average of technical proficiency.

There is shown in the same room a number of porcelain figurines by Mrs. George Oakley Totten (Miss Vicken von Post). She made them in Sweden. The effects of color in them leave a capital impression, but these, which first meet the eye, are really of less interest than the sculptural ability which Mrs. Totten reveals. She is a deft modeller, with a certain plastic gayety at her finger tips. Her types are varied, too.

New Paintings

Frederick J. Waugh, Ernest Haskell and Others

The West Indian marines at the Macbeth gallery which Mr. Frederick J. Waugh exhibits have an ingratiating moderation. In his preface to the catalogue he talks about "golden splendor" and other factors in a great symphony of color, but he has not attempted to make his canvases blaze. On the contrary, they are rather cool in key—and we are glad of it. The temptation to pyrotechnics in the Caribbean is very strong, and we have known it to lead to the making of pictures merely hot. Mr. Waugh is well advised to rely more upon deep, unfathomable blues and icy jade greens than upon rampantly tropical reds and yellows. His pictures owe much also to the frequent introduction of snowy surf. As an experienced sea painter he has success in giving his brilliant waters weight and movement. In design he is not notably felicitous, though his best picture, "Big Seas on a Reef," is particularly well put together. There is manifest truth in his impressions. He delineates tossing palms in an especially convincing manner. His work would have more beauty if he were to give a finer, more transparent quality to his pigment. As so much painted surface a representative canvas of his is curiously commonplace.

Mr. Ernest Haskell has long been known as one of the most accomplished of American etchers. He uses a pure, forceful and expressive line, and it has been extraordinarily effective in his studies of tree forms. No one has approached him in the portrayal of the cypresses and wind-tortured live oaks of the Pacific Coast. These enchanting prints of his may be seen again at the Montross gallery, possessing a marked freshness for the simple reason that they are beautiful. The collection is fairly large. Besides the familiar trees there is the figure, "Amelia," which makes one think of Beardsley a little, and there is an interesting new plate, "Stevenson's House," which shows that Mr. Haskell can draw architecture as well as he can draw trees. But an even newer revelation is made by the artist in a collection of some forty water colors. He handles the medium with unmistakable directness and certainty. Again he is the close, searching draftsman. There is a linear quality about his "Castroville" akin to the quality of D. Y. Cameron. His more characteristic work with the brush is to be observed, however, in the landscapes in which he interprets trees, whether in mass or in detail, with all of the eloquence that belongs to his etchings. His color wants variety. It is confined to a very narrow scale. So far as it goes it is pure and fine. It is interesting to see him at work in a new field—and to speculate as to what he may ultimately make of it. A richer play of color and of light may give him brilliant status as a painter.

American pictures have become a regular feature at the Ehrich gallery. They come from six artists to the present exhibition. Mr. Ivan Olinsky is the figure painter, working in a decorative vein and giving his compositions a more serious quality than they have hitherto possessed. He seems to be drawing away from the rather shallow prettiness which he has been wont to cultivate. Mr. E. H. Potthast treats the figure also, but as subordinate to a scene on the shore or in some landscape, gaining a light, clever effect. There are pleasant cattle pieces by Mr. Edward B. Volkert, and there are good landscapes by Mr. Elliot Clark and Mr. Hobart Nichols, the latter's "Day in March" lifting itself well above all its companions. Mr. Henry B. Snell sends four shore studies, noticeable for their good color and for their free, decisive handling. His art seems every year to increase in merit. There was a time when he was unduly smooth, almost timid, as a painter. Now there is some power in what he does.

The Daniel gallery in its opening exhibition ranges from the comparatively sedate conservatism of Mr. Ernest Lawson to the extremes of modernism. Perhaps Mr. Lawson does not regard himself as precisely conservative, but he seems so in the same show with the "Aucassin and Nicolette" of Mr. Charles Demuth. The latter romantically named picture represents, so far as we can make it out, a pair of factory chimneys cuddling together after a fashion rather unfavorable to the functioning of flues, whatever the recondite aim of their intimacy may be. There is a lot of this esoteric painting on the walls, weird symbolisms by Mr. Man Ray, Mr. Demuth and others. There is more edifying fare in the various studies of still life by Mr. Preston Dickinson, but he, too, oscillates in some inexplicable world. There is an interesting "Head" by Derain, vaguely reminiscent of the Italian primitives. On the whole, we turn with relief to Mr. Lawson's sane coast scenes, the highly colored flower pieces by Mr. Alfred Maurer, the sincere portrait of himself painted by Mr. McFee and Mr. Prendergast's tapestried scenes.

The Black Fan

(From the miniature by Miss E. D. Pattee at the Arden Gallery)

Random Impressions In Current Exhibitions

On November 14 there will open at the John Levy gallery an exhibition of paintings by the British artist, Mr. W. Lee Hankey. Fourteen of them will be displayed.

The Harlow gallery announces an exhibition devoted to a large and important group of etchings and lithographs by Whistler. It will be accompanied by a collection of etchings and dry points of wild fowl by Mr. Roland H. Clark.

If any of our readers recall the great exhibition of romantic and impressionist pictures which M. Durand-Ruel brought to this country in 1887 and introduced at the old building of the Academy of Design, they will recall one of the salient pictures in it, Delacroix's famous "Sardanapalus." It has just passed into the possession of the Louvre. The artist sent this canvas to the Salon in 1827. It remained in his hands until 1845, when he sold it to M. Wilson. At the Wilson sale, in 1873, Durand-Ruel bought it in for 96,000 francs. He later sold it to Mr. Duncan, of Glasgow, for 60,000 francs. In 1890 it was bought by M. Haro, still at a reduction; he paid only 30,000 francs for it. But his family disposed of it in 1893 to Baron Vitta for 80,000 francs. Now it goes into the Louvre for the tidy sum of 700,000 francs!

The etchings and dry points of Mr. Frank W. Benson, admired alike by sportsmen and connoisseurs of prints, may again be seen in an exhibition at the Kennedy gallery. Several new subjects are included.

There opened yesterday at the American Art Galleries an exhibition of Gothic and other old French furniture belonging to M. Henri de Souhami, of Paris. It will be sold during three afternoon sessions, on November 10, 11 and 12. Besides the furniture there are renaissance velvets, decorative paintings of the French, Italian and Flemish schools, a group of thirty-six tapestries and some early stained glass. It will be interesting to see if the glass sustains the market sensationally created at the Lawrence sale last season. After the Souhami sale will come, on November 14, the armor to which we have already referred, and the Spaulding collection of Japanese color prints.

The friends of the American Art Association were interested last week in Mr. T. E. Kirby's celebration of his seventy-fifth birthday—and wished that he had marked it by some definite promise of the book of reminiscences which he has for some time had in mind. It would be of great value, for the auction room, in which he has played so conspicuous a part, has reflected most of the developments in American taste. Mr. Kirby could give pointed facts and figures to illustrate the devotion of our collectors to the old Düsseldorf school, their graduation into the Salon, their emergence from that stage into appreciation of the Barbizon school and the modern Dutchmen, and then the expansion of their activities over a wide field. We took impressionism in our stride and later plunged into the old masters, first the Dutch and Flemish, then the French and English, and finally the Spanish and Italian. On all these phases of the subject Mr. Kirby must have suggestive things to say serviceable to the historian. It may be added that his management of the Hotel Druout of America has been marked throughout by uncommonly wise judgment. The familiar galleries have been filled with all manner of things, but never with work subversive of high standards. That is vastly to his credit, as well as his frequent services to charitable causes.

Mr. Gordon Grant has painted eight pictures of ships, which may be seen at the Howard Young gallery. They express a lifelong enthusiasm for the old clipper type. Before he was fifteen Mr. Grant rounded Cape Horn in a Glasgow square rigger, and he has loved sailing vessels ever since.

At the Kingore gallery there is a collection of a dozen flower paintings by the Baroness Ajroldi di Robbiate. They are big, luscious canvases. Her red carnations are magnificently red. All her flowers are painted in rich handfuls and with the fullest bloom of summer upon them. They are freely arranged, but with a certain decorative discretion, and make a handsome, if somewhat redundant, effect.

Mr. George H. Clements presents a collection of oils and water colors at the Milch gallery to-morrow, to remain on view until November 19. His subjects are drawn from the Bahamas, Mexico and various other parts of the world, including New York.

The first exhibition of the season at Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney's studio is composed of many of the American paintings and drawings she collected and showed at Venice, London, Paris and Sheffield. They form a kind of summary of the exhibition she has given here since her studio was established.

Mr. Attilio Piccirilli has modeled the statue which is to go from this country to Italy in appreciation of Italian services during the World War. The nude figure, carved in Georgia marble, has been conceived as typifying the numberless youths who, almost without weapons, routed the seasoned armies of Austria. It is called, aptly, "The Boy of the Piave." In its simple dignity it is a worthy essay in the spirit of antique Roman sculpture.

The art teachers of the high schools have made a move at the Anderson galleries, a step forward. So little has been heard or seen of this element that the current exhibition of thumb box sketches is a distinct surprise. The existence of art teachers in the public schools has been recognized since the three Rs were expanded into the modern school curriculum, including science and the arts. But rarely has one heard of them taking themselves seriously enough to place their own creations before public criticism. It may have been a "safety first" policy that restrained them. Though credit for initiating the exhibition is given to James Parton Haney, director of art in the high schools of this city, credit should also be given to a new impulse on the part of the teachers. Bound by the common ties of their profession they illustrate unlimited possibilities as an art force in the community.

There are a score of exhibitors and nearly 150 examples of their work. Of uniform size, the paintings have an agreeable impression. Great variety of technique and motive is illustrated, and, what is more remarkable, a pronounced lack of academic influence. Doubtless most of the paintings were made during the limited scope of the vacation period. This probably accounts for the absence of local subjects, if those drawn from along the water front are excepted. There are many charming landscapes, beach scenes and New England and up-state mountain studies. Particularly brilliant are the paintings of Thomas Spector, reflecting the varied colors and warm sunlight of the beach. Ruth Drake, in her studies of Bermuda, paints with a broad hand and clever vision. Village subjects by Beulah Stevenson are vivid and colorful. One of the largest individual groups is by M. E. Tuthill, a series of decorative pastels emphasizing the most radiant aspects of nature in delicate harmony of color. Rose Collins and Bertha Shepard have also commendable groups of water-front studies.

An exceptionally fine likeness of Marshal Foch is exhibited in the window of Cartier's on Fifth Avenue. It is a miniature on ivory by the American artist, Gustav Brock. He has painted his subject with delicacy and realism, giving a vivid life quality. The marshal is in military dress and is wearing the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor, as well as ribbons of the various orders conferred upon him.

Mrs. M.

(From the miniature by Miss E. Dix the Arden Gallery)

Japan Has Cabinet of Artists

TOKIO, Sept. 10 (By Mail).—Japan has a Cabinet of artists, and Premier Hara heads the list. Writings and paintings of some of the great men of the Japan of to-day brought big prices at a recent auction held by the Tokio Fine Arts Club.

Three pictures painted by Mr. Hara sold for the equivalent of $600 and another four brought about $800.

Prince Yamagata's productions brought about $250 to $300, while some kakemono written with proverbs in the Japanese language by Prince Saionji brought from $200 to $300.

A chrysanthemum painted by Mr. Noda, the Minister of Communications, sold for $60, and an orchid from his brush fetched $70.

Mr. Yamatoto, Minister of Agriculture and Commerce, had a picture and Mr. Tokonami, the Home Minister, a poem.

The painting of kakemono is a favorite pastime of the Japanese.